Wallia

(r. 415 - 418)

BRIEFING

Wallia, Walha or Vallia (Spanish: Walia, Portuguese Vália), (c. 385 – 418) was king of the Visigoths from 415 to 418, earning a reputation as a great warrior and prudent ruler. He was elected to the throne after Athaulf and Sigeric were both assassinated in 415. One of Wallia's most notable achievements was negotiating a foedus (a kind of treaty or agreement) with the Roman emperor Honorius in 416. This agreement allowed the Visigoths to settle in Aquitania, a region in modern-day France, in exchange for military service to Rome. This settlement marked a significant step towards the eventual establishment of a Visigothic kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula. He was succeeded by Theodoric I.

BIOGRAPHY

Political intrigue preceded Wallia's ascension to power, for his Visigothic predecessor Athaulf *—who married Galla Placidia in 414* — was murdered by his followers who believed him to be a puppet to Roman interests. Athaulf's successor, Sigeric, ignored the Visigothic rights of procedure to military leadership and seemed to likewise acquiesce to the Romans; such perceptions among his people quickly led to his death in turn just seven-days after assuming power. Wallia was chosen to replace Sigeric in 415, since the Visigoths were convinced he would end any peace negotiations with Rome undertaken by his forerunners. At the time, the Goths' main antagonist was Constantius, the magister militum of emperor Honorius.

Like his predecessor Alaric, Wallia attempted to take his Gothic forces to northern Africa but ultimately *"foundered in the Sea of Gibraltar"*, a failure that precipitated his suing for peace. Subsequently, Wallia accepted a treaty offered by Honorius with the Roman Empire. Christian historian and theologian, Orosius, reported that the terms of the agreements made in 416 and 418 were very favorable for the Romans, including the return of Honorius' sister Galla Placidia to him. Whatever advantages won by Wallia in acquiring food for his forces via treaty with Rome, it was Constantius who exploited the situation by securing the return of emperor's sister, a move historian Michael Kulikowski termed, a route "into the imperial family".

Gothic War in Spain

Now operating in Roman service as foederati, Wallia and his Goths marched against the Alans and Vandals in both Baetica and Lusitania with *"dramatic success"*. These exploits against the Asding Vandals and Alans were at the behest of Constantius. Between 417 and into 418, Wallia's Goths inflicted considerable defeats upon the Vandals and the Alans alike; even killing the Alan ruler, Addax. To this end, Roman writer and clergyman Hydatius recorded how Wallia, king of the Goths "in the name of Rome...inflicted a vast slaughter upon the barbarians in Spain". For whatever reason, Constantius recalled Wallia's Goths *—historian Randers-Pehrson suggests that the magister militum was alarmed and fearful of their success—* and then *"settled them in southern Gaul."* Nonetheless, Wallia's Gothic federates were *"assigned"* the Garonne valley from *"Toulouse to Bordeaux"* and the coastal strip along the Atlantic from Les Landes at the foot of the Pyrenees mountains "to the Loire in the north". Despite his success, Wallia died before he was able to leave Spain.

Wallia's daughter was the mother of Ricimer and the mother-in-law of Gundowech, King of the Burgundians.

Wallia is sometimes assumed to have been the historical model for the legendary figure of Walter of Aquitaine.